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COLUMN

Whose Logic Is It Anyway?

February 21, 2000

By Darrin Woods

Why do today's voice over IP vendors promote the use of H.323 versus SIP? Technology editor Darrin Woods questions the logic behind today's VoIP protocols. Read his online column.

Logic has a logic all its own, and that logic is...well, illogical. I came to this conclusion recently while meeting with a voice over IP (VoIP) vendor. This vendor's product currently supports only H.323 for transport, so I asked the company's chief technology officer if the company has any plans to support SIP (Session Initiation Protocol). His answer, based on his own logic, defied mine. "We support what customers want, and right now customers are telling us they want H.323. If a lot of customers tell us they want to use SIP, then we'll look into supporting it." In other words, the egg came about only after the chickens, realizing their mortality; decided they wanted to reproduce.

OK, I admit it: Voice over IP has never thrilled me. Yes, I believe that circuit switching is dead and all voice traffic will eventually be packetized. I just have a hard time believing that the best transmission is by IP. My manager tells me that's what makes me the perfect person to write about Voice over IP (this is defined as "managerial logic"). Since I came into the packetized voice market with preconceived notions about all VoIP being bad, it's amazing that I came out with a different opinion. Don't get me wrong, I still don't like VoIP. But if it's a necessary evil we might as well do it right, and in my opinion, that is with SIP.

I had never really studied any of the VoIP protocols in detail. I knew the names and had tested a few of them, but until recently I had no opinion as to which is better. But after taking a closer look, I see that H.323 is a problem waiting for an answer. SIP, on the other hand, is an answer waiting for a problem. H.323 has to be continually extended and improved just to begin answering some of the problems of which SIP was borne. So why don't vendors use a ready-made answer instead of trying to solve the problem by forcing the current

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Back to vendor logic: Vendors are just trying to make us happy, right? They want to give us what we want. The catch is, until we know what we want, we keep getting the same old crap. In order for vendors to give us what we want before we know we want it, they have to innovate. But when vendors innovate, they often give us things we don't need or want.

So how do we get the innovations we want, without all the bloated extras? We need to tell the vendors what we want, and we have to tell them sooner rather than later—we can't wait until they give us whatever they want to give us and try to convince us it's what we need! If we don't, those of us who want to see support for SIP will continue to be at the vendors' mercy.

Send your comments on this column to Darrin Woods at dwoods@nwc.com.

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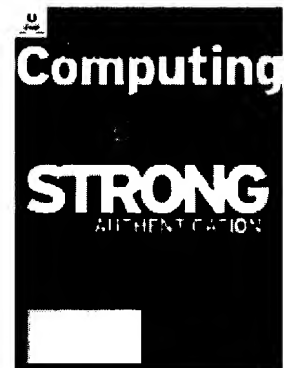
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